

Message Text

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ACTION INR-10

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SUBJ: SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA

REFS: A. STATE 134913, B. ALGIERS 0532, C. ALGIERS 1170,
D. ALGIERS 1526, E. ALGIERS 1538

AS CITED IN REFTELS, GOA OFFICIALS HAVE RECENTLY MADE A NUMBER OF STATEMENTS TO US REGARDING SOVIET/CUBAN ACTIVITY IN AFRICA. EMBASSY COMMENTS FOLLOW, KEYED TO STATE REFTELS.

(1) HOST GOVERNMENT'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOVIET AND CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA: IN OUR VIEW, THE GOA VIEWS THE SOVIET/CUBAN ROLE REALISTICALLY -- AS THAT OF ESTABLISHING A SPERE OF INFLUENCE FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REASONS. OFTEN, BECAUSE BOTH SOVIETS/CUBANS AND ALGERIANS FIND THEMSELVES ON THE SAME SIDE OF VARIOUS "LIBERATION STRUGGLES" AND OTHER POLITICAL ISSUES, THERE IS A COINCIDENCE OF VIEWS. WHEN IT COMES TO VOCALIZING ITS SUPPORT, HOWEVER, THE GOA TAKES A SELF-SERVING LINE, DOING SO ONLY WHEN IT IS CLEARLY IN ITS INTEREST.

THE GOA USUALLY LIMITS EXPRESSIONS OF ANY CONCERN IT MAY HAVE TO PRIVATE DISAPPROVAL OF ALL GREAT POWER ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA. FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE AMBASSADOR'S FEBRUARY DISCUSSION WITH BOUMEDIENE (REFTEL B), THE LATTER CLAIMED TO BE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DANGERS INHERENT IN THE EMERGING PATTERN OF THE BIG POWERS "USING SMALLER NATIONS TO DO THEIR "DIRTY WORK" IN AFRICA. HE CITED
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AS EXAMPLES THE SOVIETS USING THE CUBANS IN ETHIOPIA AND ANGOLA AND THE U.S. USING EGYPT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND MOROCCO IN SHABA, STATING "IT IS OFTEN DIFFICULT FOR THE BIG POWERS TO CONTROL THEIR TOOLS."

OCCASIONALLY, THE GOA WILL FIND ITSELF AT ODDS WITH THE SOVIETS AND CUBANS OVER A PARTICULAR ISSUE. THE LATEST IS ERITREA, AND IT WAS PRIMARILY IN THIS CONTEXT THAT PRESIDENTIAL COUNSELOR SLIMANE

HOFFMAN STATED TO US PRIVATELY THAT THE GOA IS "AS CONCERNED AS THE USG OVER THE CUBAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFRICA." (REFTEL D).

IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, THE GOA CONTINUES TO SEE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES IN AFRICA AS ENHANCING ITS POLICY AIMS, AND SENIOR MFA OFFICIALS EXPRESS THE VIEW THAT THE SOVIET/CUBAN ROLE BALANCES WESTERN INTERVENTION IN AFRICA. ACCORDINGLY, THE GOA HAS LINKED SOVIET/CUBAN MILITARY ACTIVITIES TO FRENCH INTERVENTION IN THE SAHARA AND ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA, AND SOME GOA OFFICIALS DISTINGUISH BETWEEN POSSIBLE CUBAN INTERVENTION IN ERITREA AT THE REQUEST OF A SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT TO HELP SETTLE "A PURELY INTERNAL MATTER" AND, ON THE OTHER HAND, "FRENCH INTERVENTION IN THE SAHARA AT THE REQUEST OF A GOVERNMENT INVOLVED IN CONFLICT FOR TERRITORY OVER WHICH IT HAS NO LEGAL CLAIM OF SOVEREIGNTY (REFTELS D AND E).

(2) THEIR DEFINITION OF ATTENDANT PROBLEMS AND

(3) PRESCRIPTION FOR THEIR HANDLING: THE GOA IS CONCERNED WITH SOVIET/CUBAN ACTIVITIES ONLY WHEN THESE CONFLICT WITH SPECIFIC ALGERIAN POLICY AIMS. ALGERIA DID NOT CRITICIZE THE SOVIET/CUBAN ROLE IN THE OGADEN (SEEING IT INSTEAD AS SUPPORTIVE OF OAU CHARTER PROVISIONS AFFIRMING THE INVIOABILITY OF AFRICA'S INHERITED BORDERS). IN ERITREA, HOWEVER, ALGERIA'S RECORD OF SUPPORT FOR ERITREAN LIBERATION GROUPS HAS MADE IT UNEASY ABOUT POSSIBLE SOVIET/CUBAN INVOLVEMENT. THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT THE GOA HAS MADE OVERTURES TO THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT URGING THAT CUBAN TROOPS NOT BE USED AGAINST ERITREAN SEPARATISTS. IN THIS INSTANCE, THE ALGERIANS WOULD CLEARLY PREFER A NEGOTIATED POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. NONETHELESS, IN SPITE OF ANY RESERVATIONS THE GOA MAY HAVE REGARDING SOVIET/

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CUBAN ACTIVITY OR ANY REMONSTRATIONS IT MAY MAKE IN PRIVATE, ALGERIA WILL NEVER BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF ANY PUBLIC CONDEMNATION OF THE SOVIET/CUBAN ROLE IN AFRICA.

(4) THE EXTENT TO WHICH HOST GOVERNMENT VIEWS SOVIET/CUBAN ROLE AS DIVISIVE, ETC.: THIS ASPECT OF SOVIET/CUBAN ACTIVITY IS NOT PROMINENT IN THE GOA'S THINKING. IT IS NOT THE KIND OF CONCERN THE GOA MIGHT HAVE. THE GOA IS NOT DISTURBED, FOR EXAMPLE, TO FIND ITSELF IN A "PROGRESSIVE" CAMP FACING A "REACTIONARY" CAMP MADE UP OF SUCH COUNTRIES AS MOROCCO, ZAIRE, SENEGAL, AND OTHERS. STEPHAN

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